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WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME?
THE POTENTIAL SIDE EFFECTS OF MEDITATION

Malorie Mackey
Actress, author and adventurer

Malorie Mackey is an actress, host, and writer living in Los Angeles, CA. Malorie's first book was published in 2017 and her short story "What Love Has Taught Me" has been published in the anthology "Choices." You can find Malorie's travel content on dozens of digital media platforms. Check out www.maloriesadventures.com for more. Malorie's adventures don't just encompass physical adventures. She has been a student of intuition since she was a teenager, studying at Edgar Cayce's A.R.E. In 2019, Malorie discovered the Monroe Institute while filming her travel show. Since then, she has been studying the art and science of consciousness through many different programs and life experiences.

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Meditation can easily offer numerous benefits in your life. After I started meditating, I began seeing more details in the world around me. Colors got brighter. I began to look at problems in a different, more diverse way. Other known benefits include an ease in anxiety, more patience and tolerance and better control over emotions.

However, not all changes brought on by your meditation practice can be completely pleasant at first. As human beings, we are accustomed to want things to remain the same. We get nervous when things shift out of our comfort zone, especially when these things are related to something as important as our brains. But it's important to understand what changes are happening to your brain and what they mean for you as you start meditating.

First, let's discuss "passive" and mindful meditation.

For the purposes of this post, "passive" meditation includes meditation practices that don't use audio or technology-supported stimulation. While there isn't a lot of data out there yet on the science of meditation, more and more studies are slowly starting to surface as of the last few years.

A study from UCLA found that meditation can potentially preserve the grey matter of your brain. In their study, they looked at the brains of those who had meditated regularly for twenty

years and those who did not. They were surprised to find that the group that meditated had more grey matter volume throughout their brains than those who did not.

Then, neuroscientist Sara Lazar of Mass General and Harvard Medical School did her own research, which showed similar results. Her studies found that those who meditated for seven to nine years consistently had increased gray matter in many areas of their brains, specifically the sensory regions. Her studies went a step further to show that even after eight weeks of consistent meditation, a group who had never meditated before had their brains evolve slightly to become stronger. Parts of their brains experienced thickening.

As these changes could be happening to our brains as we meditate, especially in the early stages, it is normal to experience some discomfort. When I first began meditating, I noticed that my head was feeling “weird.” I felt a pressure in the center of my head and would occasionally experience headaches. I began confusing related words (such as “left” and “right”), and I became fearful something was wrong with me. But, thankfully, it was only the side effects of my brain adapting to the meditation.

The side effects of “passive” and mindful meditation:

Getting headaches is probably the most common side effect of passive meditation. According to experts, this is because you are taking in a great amount of energy through your crown and third-eye chakras, much more than your body is used to. Because your body isn’t used to this great amount of energy, you may not know how to appropriately pass the energy down through the rest of your body. There are many techniques to absorb, spread out and release the energy easily, so this is a side effect you should be able to quickly work through.

Another side effect is “foggy brain.” If we have trouble grounding ourselves, we might find that we mix up words—even words we use daily. You might say “left” instead of “right” or mix up the names of colors. This is something I experienced frequently after diving deeper into my meditation practice.

Another common side effect of mediation is having trouble sleeping. This happened to me a lot when I first began meditating. When I meditated frequently, I would find myself just “clicking out” or going to another light state of consciousness instead of falling deeply into sleep.

Disconnect and a sense of hyper-awareness seem like two polar-opposite side effects, but they come from the same cause. Because meditation has you spending time in other levels of consciousness, often alone, you can begin to lose your sense of self in the physical world. The more you experience time in other levels, the less you may feel at home here in your physical body.

The good news is that these side effects of mediation are common and generally easy to work through. If you are feeling one of these due to your passive mediation practice, work on it. Talk to you higher self the next time you meditate, seek guidance and work on this aspect of your practice.

Most likely, these side effects are occurring because your brain's grey matter is changing. This fluctuation in grey matter is actually a good thing! The process can just come with a little discomfort from the change. If you find it's too much for you, I encourage you to take a break for a bit as you readjust or speak with a teacher or mentor that you trust with your practice. Of course, if there is too much discomfort, be sure to speak with a medical professional.

But what happens when we add in binaural beats and experience technology-supported meditation?

When you add technological stimulation to your meditations, such as binaural beats, phase modulation and amplitude modulation, suddenly your meditation practice can take you to states of consciousness that people spend years of passive practice to get to. It's safe to say that these tools could boost your practice to the next level very quickly.

Recent studies on binaural beats have uncovered surprising benefits. One study found that by listening to binaural beats in a beta range, it helped to improve performance on simple tasks, as well as lift people's moods. Most people in the study found their ability to focus was sharpened. Several other recent studies found that binaural beats significantly reduced anxiety levels. And most people participating in these studies felt more creative.

Though there are wonderful benefits to binaural beats and technology-supported meditation, it is important to go slow and take care with your practice. While there are very few recorded side effects, no one person's brain activity is identical to someone else's. There is no way to target a specific area of the brain with binaural beats, so it becomes a full-brain experience. Neurological pathways get created from this, which, in theory, can help in many ways with imbalances. However, more studies need to be done on the subject to understand the full range of long-term side effects.

As of now, the most common side effects include anxiety, headaches, nausea, surfacing of old memories, and nightmares. But no two bodies are the same, and in the end, it's never clear how someone will react to stimulation. So, the advice I've heard time and time again with technology-supported meditation is this: treat it like a workout.

You never go into a workout journey with the heaviest weights. You start lifting the smallest weights and slowly build the muscles to work your way up. I've been advised to treat my meditation practice in a similar way. It may be wise to start your meditation practice mindfully. Then, build on your practice with binaural beats and other technology support, such as Monroe

Audio Support. Perhaps you can begin with a few sessions a week and work your way up to more. A gradual journey is better than taking it all on too quickly. I've read that most cases of side effects come from overdoing it too quickly.

What does all this mean?

By no means should this deter you from your meditation practice. I'm simply providing this information so that you have an understanding that when you meditate, your brain may be changing, and your body may feel different because of it. This is generally a normal part of the process that occurs when you begin meditating regularly. If you accept the discomfort, it generally passes the more you dive into your practice. However, always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a potential medical condition.

I'll leave you with this: in my experiences, I have felt each of these side effects in turn, and I have grown and moved past all of them in my process. Discomfort is a part of growth, and it is important to remember that. I hope your meditation brings you a plethora of benefits as you grow with and expand your practice.